

The Builder.

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HE records of the London trade-guilds, fraternities, mysteries, crafts, or, as they are now called, Companies, contain much interesting and useful matter, which would serve to throw light on the state of society in early times, to illustrate history, and to show, amongst other things, the progress of building and the growth of the metropolis. Indisposition on the part of the companies to permit access to these documents is probably the reason why little use has been made of them. We have a general history of the twelve principal companies, but there is a wide and promising field of research here yet open for the historian and archaeologist.

In 1846, when describing the decorative paintings discovered in Carpenters' Hall, London-wall,* we suggested that the charters and records of the Carpenters' Company, which company formerly exercised great power over the trade, would probably afford much interesting information, and we expressed a hope that we might soon be able to avail ourselves of them. Since then, and led to it by the inquiries and remarks made at that time, Mr. Edward B. Jupp, the clerk of the company, has diligently examined all their records, and has now published a historical account of the company, chiefly compiled from these, which will be read with considerable interest by many, and will, we hope, serve as an inducement to others to follow the example.†

The formation of guilds in our own country dates from an early period in our history; they played an important part in the development of society, enabling the trading classes to resist the tyranny of the nobles, and lessening the distance between the two. Reigning monarchs saw what powerful checks these combinations were on the aristocracy, and willingly granted them charters of incorporation and important privileges.

The earliest charter possessed by the Carpenters' Company is dated 7th July, 1477 (the 17th of Edward IV.), but it is not by any means certain that this was the first; the common seal of the company and grant of arms are dated 1466, and there is a distinct notice of a guild of carpentry in 1421-2. Going still further back, the city records show that at least as early as 1271, two master carpenters, and the same number of master masons, were sworn as officers, to perform certain duties with reference to buildings and walls, of much the same nature as those which were confided to the same number of members of these two companies, under the title of city viewlers, until within little more than a century ago. Chaucer, too, in his "Canterbury Tales," written probably in the reign of Richard II., introduces five individuals of different trades, whom he describes as clothed in the livery of "a grete fraternite," and of these, one is a carpenter,—

"A haberdasher and a carpenter,
A webbe, a dyer, and a tapiser.
Were all y' clothed in o' livery,
Of a solempne and grete fraternite."

The earliest entry in the Company's books is dated 1438, and is headed (abandoning the spelling of the time, which Mr. Jupp has carefully preserved), "Jesu and his mother dear have mercy on Croffton the carpenter. He gave you this book to all the company."

The preamble of the first charter, already alluded to, sets forth, on the part of King Edward, that understanding "that divers work-manships, or works in the mystery of carpentry, have oftentimes heretofore been made, and daily are made, insufficiently, which thing, if it should be suffered to be so done it would redound not only to our prejudice but also to the manifest deceit of our liege people and subjects, and that for want of government, correction, and oversight, to be had in the said mystery, we, willing to meet with such prejudice and deceit as we are bounden for the bettering of our lieges and subjects aforesaid," give license for the establishment of the guild, &c.

In this charter, full power and authority is given to the master and wardens "to oversee, search, rule, and govern the said commonalty and mystery, and all men occupying the same, their servants, stuffs, works, and merchandise whatsoever" appertaining to the mystery within the city, suburbs, and precincts, and to punish and correct at their discretion.

Various entries in the books show the course taken by the company under these powers: they granted licenses for the erection of buildings, and punished by fine or imprisonment where license had not been taken or the work badly done. We must content ourselves with two or three specimens:—

Thus, in 1474,—"Item; paid to serjeants by diverse times for arresting of stuff" (seizing defective timber) 6s."

1500. "Item; received of Gyffte to have the good-will of the fellowship to set up a house in Bridge-street, 10s."

1503. "Received of a foreign carpenter to have license to set up a house within Serjeant's Inn, Chancery-lane, 20d." (wⁱⁿ the Serjeant in, in Chaunceloor-lane.)

1567. "Received of Thomas Huat for that his boards did not bear measure, 2s. 6d." And then in 1572, "John Curtis was committed to ward at the master's commandment, for the work which he did in St. Paul's Churchyard, without license of the master and wardens."

Matters in dispute were usually either decided by the court or referred to arbitrators, who in an early order-book of the company are styled "daysmen," an old term for umpire;* and it is seen that members of the company were sometimes made answerable for the "yll words" of their wives. Thus, in 1556, "Received of Frank Steleerag a fyne for ill-words that his wife gave to John Dorant, 2s." The ladies of the company are much better behaved now-a-days.

In the same year, John Griffin was fined 6d. for coming to the hall in his coat and leather apron; and Master Abbot to the same extent, because he "helde not his pees before the master hade knockyd with the sylence 3 times."

The opposition offered by the company to foreigners (a term which applied also to non-freemen) was very determined and continuous.

* The term daysman is employed, says Mr. Jupp, in rendering that fine passage in the book of Job—"For is he not a man as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment; neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both?"

Spenser, also, in the "Faery Queene," says—
"For what art thou
That mak'st thyself his daysman to prolong
The vengeance prest?"

—Vol. II., canto viii., v. 28.

The entries of payments for their arrest are numerous.

In 1607 the jurisdiction of the Carpenters' Company was extended by charter of King James I. to the compass of two miles round the city. By this charter the oversight, search, correction, government, and reformation of all works and things concerning the art of carpentry, and of their measures, were granted to the company, also the control of all reparations and buildings. Power was given to a certain number of members of the company to enter into the premises of any one following the trade of a carpenter, to see if the works were skillfully done, to cease and dispose of all improper stuffs, punishing the offenders; and, upon application of any party grieved, to reform and correct the buildings, works, or reparations.

In the same year a set of stringent bye-laws were framed for the regulation of the company. By these no person of the fellowship is to meddle with other branches of the building trade, under penalty of 20s., more or less at the discretion of the master and wardens. And in order to discountenance masons, bricklayers, and others, who "oftentimes do take upon them in a bargain by great, not only to deal for such things as appertain to their own art, craft, or mystery, but also to finish diverse parts, and many times the whole buildings," "whereby the king's majesty's subjects, being owners of the buildings, are very much and often deceived of true and substantial stuff and workmanship,"—no carpenter was allowed to work for any mason, bricklayer, or other so acting, "by bargain in great" (in the lump), but only for wages by the day, under a penalty not exceeding 3l.

Another bye-law provides that the master and wardens shall search for timber, boards, joists, quarters, &c., belonging to the carpentry, to be sold, to see that the same contain the just length, measure, &c., according to a schedule which is given at length.

By a charter of Charles I., in 1640, the company's jurisdiction was further extended to a compass of four miles round the city of London, and their former powers were confirmed, with the exception of that of reforming and correcting buildings, "in lieu of which they were empowered to retard and delay all insufficient buildings, works, and workmanship until the Commissioners of the Crown in the cities of London and Westminster, and the neighbouring places, or any two or more of them, should have notice from the master and wardens, and should provide a fit remedy."

In connection with the powers of search, some of the entries are curious, showing that it was exercised very resolutely. In these searches the King's "master carpenter" was permitted to accompany the wardens if he pleased. Of those who held this appointment Mr. Jupp gives some particulars, as he does also of those who held the office of surveyor of the King's works. On our next page is a portrait of Portington, who held the former office many years, engraved from a picture in Carpenters' Hall: the second engraving is from a painting also in the hall.

The books of the company contain many entries connected with the impressment of workmen for the service of the crown. Amongst the latest instances is this:—"1668, 22nd July—Spent with Sir John Denham, the King's surveyor, and others, about the twelve carpenters charged to be impressed for the King's work at Whitehall, 35s. 6d."

At the beginning of the seventeenth century,

* See vol. iv., p. 87.

† A Historical Account of the Worshipful Company of Carpenters of the City of London, compiled chiefly from records in their possession, by Edward Basil Jupp, Clerk of the Company. London, Pictering.